

Introduction to Training and Professional Development

What is Training and Professional Development?

Training and Professional Development is the process of improving an employee's skills and competencies to maintain and improve performance. It includes skills and knowledge attained for both personal development and career advancement. Planning professional development with each employee, and implementing that plan, are essential to an effective performance management system.

Professional development encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, including formal courses and classes, conferences, and informal learning opportunities, such as: consultation, coaching, communities of practice, mentoring, reflective supervision and technical assistance.

Why are Training and Professional Development Important to Do?

Training and Professional Development are essential components of workforce planning. An organization is on track for high performance and the accomplishments of its objectives when:

1. The mission, vision and goals of the organization are clearly articulated through a strategic plan;
2. Performance competencies are established that tie each individual's work to the organizational goals;
3. Individual job descriptions and performance expectations are linked directly to those competencies; and
4. *Each employee develops clear learning objectives and training/development plans that will enhance the skills and competencies they already have, and expand their range to help them achieve their career goals and the organization's objectives.*

Succession Planning is particularly reliant on an effective professional development program.

What are Obstacles to Training and Professional Development?

One of the first line items to be reduced when budgets shrink is often professional development and training. Unfortunately, this action can have the opposite of the intended effect. Trained and energized employees are just what an organization needs to stimulate growth and to solve the challenges that arise in lean times. Following are some of the reasons employee training is so important.

1. Innovation, flexibility and dedication are necessary to build truly dynamic organizations. One of the best ways to encourage and support creativity and energy in your workforce is through professional development and training. As employees develop new skills, increase networking, and develop leadership capabilities, the work environment strengthens with improved morale and effectiveness.

2. Sending employees to training opportunities, or bringing opportunities into the organization, actually infuses the workplace with new ideas and creative ways of solving old problems. Sometimes, just getting employees out of the day-to-day of their work schedule is enough to jump-start ideas and encourage employees to recommit to their jobs and the organization. Learning new skills and interacting with new and different people has a direct impact on the productivity and development of the work environment.
3. Trainings need not be expensive or time-consuming in order to be worthwhile. Workshops, classes, on-line learning and cross-training in other departments or units can be as invigorating as expensive courses and conferences. Encouraging employees to learn all they can about the organization and the State as a whole--not just the department they serve--is one way to approach training. This will complement their understanding of their individual jobs by giving them a good overall understanding of how all the pieces work together to contribute to the whole.

Consider implementing or keeping regular training opportunities in place for employees. Regular training sessions (weekly, monthly or quarterly) can be quite productive. Spot trainings on very narrow topics can be done in an hour or two, during a “brown-bag” lunch or an extended break. The investment an organization makes to promote learning in these ways will be repaid many times over in with qualified, energetic, and effective personnel.

Why Do Individuals Participate in Training and Professional Development?

Individuals may participate in professional development for a variety of reasons, including:

- An interest in lifelong learning
- A sense of obligation
- To maintain and improve professional competence
- To enhance career progression
- To keep abreast of new technology, theory and practice
- To comply with professional requirements.

What Kinds of Professional Development Options are Available?

Professional development opportunities can range widely, from a single workshop or series course to coursework toward a degree. Such training may be offered by a multitude of different professional development providers. Training may vary widely in philosophy, content, and format. Examples include:

- **Coursework/Class Work** – Classes or courses provide information and practice on particular subject matter to participants. Content may address solving practical dilemmas, or it may introduce concepts or skills and provide hands on activities to apply those to everyday professional examples.
- **Case Study** - This method presents a case to participants, and asks them to reason through to a solution, putting them in the role of a decision maker.
- **Consultation** – An expert or facilitator assists an individual or group of individuals as they clarify and address immediate concerns by following a systematic problem-solving process.

- **Coaching** – A coach (internal or external individual who is familiar with the skills being developed) provides observation, reflection and action to enhance a participant's competencies in a specific skill area.
- **Communities of Practice** This method improves professional practice by providing engagement in shared inquiry and learning among people who have a common goal.
- **Mentoring** – This approach involves partnering an employee with someone with experience in the area identified for growth. It promotes an individual's awareness and refinement of his or her own professional development by providing structured opportunities for observation and reflection.
- **Reflective Supervision** – This is a style of supervision that supports, develops, and ultimately evaluates employee performance. The supervisor uses formal and informal inquiry to encourage the employee's understanding and articulation of the rationale for their own practices and behaviors.
- **Technical Assistance** – This approach promotes improvement in individuals and their organization by offering resources and information, and supporting networking and change efforts.

How Can Training and Professional Development Help ME? (. . . and my organization)

It can...

- Improve morale
- Improve the skills and knowledge levels for the entire organization
- Reduce turnover
- Spark creativity and problem-solving
- Help with knowledge transfer and succession planning

How can I assist my staff with Training and Professional Development?

1. Ensure that each supervisor has developed with each employee a Professional Work Plan, using the Professional Work Planning Template provided in the right navigation box on the Workforce Planning Training and Development webpage. This will provide a solid platform for implementing the goals and objectives of the organization.
2. Ensure that each supervisor has developed with each employee an Individual Professional Development and Training Plan. A template is provided in the right navigation box as above. This will guide you through a series of questions to assess current development needs, set goals for the future, estimate resources needed to accomplish those goals, and evaluate progress.
3. Core Competencies are designed to provide guidance and transparency for supervisors and employees regarding the knowledge, skills and abilities state employees should possess to be most successful in their work. On the right hand navigation of this page you will find a link to the Vermont Statewide Core Competencies. These competencies are grouped into ten categories and each competency has several suggested measurable outcomes. They are designed this way for ease of use and understanding. These are base-level competencies suitable for all employees.

We realize that even with an available template, professional work planning may be challenging and encourage supervisors and managers to contact the staff of The Summit: Center for State Employee Development at any time for assistance through training and on-site consulting with your organization.

To help you and your employees complete professional development plans linked to the statewide core competencies, the Summit offers a number of open enrollment trainings. All trainings are tied back to the Vermont Statewide Core Competencies. For a complete list of courses and for more information, visit: http://humanresources.vermont.gov/training/the_summit.

Current Summit Center trainings in the area of leadership development include such topics as:

- Supervisor Development Program
- Vermont Public Manager Program
- Business Process Management
- Project management
- Team-building
- Communication skills (including conflict management)
- Mentoring and coaching
- Performance management
- Labor relations issues
- Succession Planning
- Strategic Planning
- On-line courses addressing a number of subject

For additional information or assistance with professional development and training please contact The Summit: Center for State Employee Development directly at 241-1114 or workforceplanning@state.vt.us.